An exploration of integration and how universities ‘do’ it

A Slovenian case-study


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• Policy Trajectory (Ball et al., 2012)

Each context involves struggle and compromise and ad-hokery. They are loosely-coupled and there is no simple one direction of flow of information between them.
Inferences from the Euro-polity (1)

• **Europe of Knowledge** (*instrumentalisation of HE and HEIs*)
• discursive pressure to integrate
  – supranational agency (EU), Bologna Process, NPM
  – increased importance of quality within Europe at large
• **“Strong Universities for a Strong Europe”** (Glasgow Declaration, EUA, 2005)
• research funding – a ‘carrot’ for cooperation

Modernisation of higher education (EU, 2011)
*Improving governance and funding:* it is necessary to increase investment in higher education and to diversify funding sources, drawing to a larger extent on private funding. In addition, funding systems must be more flexible, enable institutions to set their strategic direction and be results-based in order to introduce an element of competition.

Bucharest Communiqué (2012)
*We stress the importance of developing more efficient governance and managerial structures at higher education institutions.*
## Inferences from the Euro-polity (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Institutions</th>
<th>Organisations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Constructing organisations (Brunsson &amp; Sahlin-Andersson, 2000) based on NPM principles</td>
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<td>...to turn the institutions into dynamic, entrepreneurial, high-quality enterprises (Bleiklie, 2005)</td>
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<td>• Implications for Universities:</td>
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<td>• ‘complete’ organisational actors (de Boer et al., 2007; Krücken &amp; Meier 2006)</td>
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<td>• capable of engaging in the emerged HE market (Marginson, 2006) and accountable for their new roles and responsibilities</td>
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<td>• rationalisation of the university (Ramirez, 2006)</td>
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Europe needs **strong and creative universities** as **key actors** in shaping the European knowledge society... This will be achieved by self-confident institutions able to **determine their own development** and to **contribute** to social, cultural and economic well-being … Universities are committed to **improving their governing structures** and **leadership competence** so as to increase their **efficiency and innovative capacity** and to **achieve their multiple missions.** (EUA, 2005)
What does integration actually mean?

*that a single, complex system exists; and that the composite components can be optimally mixed to form an integral, and thus more effective, whole*

NB: the constituent parts combined to form an ‘integral whole’ - in a variety of ways. Thus, no one model of integration exists. Rather, *how universities do integration is highly contingent upon context.*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION</th>
<th>VERTICAL INTEGRATION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Admin</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategic Alignment</strong> –</td>
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<td>• HR</td>
<td>- of internal members (faculties)</td>
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<td>• Finance</td>
<td>- with environment</td>
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<td>• QA</td>
<td><strong>Rationalised institutional governance</strong></td>
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<td>• Student Affairs</td>
<td>- decision-making structures</td>
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<td>• Etc.</td>
<td>- rules and regulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Academic</td>
<td><strong>Innovation system</strong></td>
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<td>• Tribes &amp; territories</td>
<td>- QA systems, etc.</td>
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<td>• Modes of knowledge production</td>
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The Slovenian university legacy

Historically....

• ‘loosely- coupled’ universities consisted of powerful, legally autonomous faculties, divided into distinct, self-managing entities

• culture of collegial governance

• melange of academic traditions
Slovenian reforms (the “ideal”)

Then came independence and “integration”...

• university is a unified, **autonomous, legal entity** (HE Act, 1993)
  – new system of integrated, lump-sum funding
  – faculties retain autonomy to generate and spend income independently

• **national policy agenda** (National Plan for HE 2011-2020)
  – institutional development, internal cooperation, increased external cooperation & relevance, reformed career system, competition and diversity, strategic actorhood
  – increased development funding for HEIs (in theory)

• **new structures**: National QA agency, Qual. Framework

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**National Plan for HE 2011-2020**

*Establish a system of internal organisation of universities which will encourage cooperation between departments and/or members and enable a greater number of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes.*
International norms meet local identities

“Currently, visions of the university proposed by the academic community and visions of it proposed by reformers and policymakers (within ongoing reforms) are worlds apart” (Kwiek, 2014)
Research Design

• Qualitative, Embedded Multiple-Case Study: University of Ljubljana, University of Maribor
Interpretation

Dichotomies

• University level
  • UM: determined attempt by the rectorate to integrate
    • well-designed and aligned strategic documents
    • an assertive rectorate
    • new, university-wide organisational units (e.g. QDC, RAZ:UM)
    • more structured approach stemming from the central administration
  • UL: more democratic, ad-hoc, yet not altogether ineffective
    • ‘functional’ approach: integration initiatives are initiated at the level of
      the member (faculty) or confined to specific ‘functions’ of the
      university (e.g. KUL project or joint programmes)
    • limited role of central administration
    • fewer integrated organisational structures

• Faculty level
  • Disconnect between declarations at university level and subjective
    interpretations by members and individuals
This year, we managed to achieve a huge victory because we managed to design and confirm the strategy of the university...not of the faculties. We also approved an action plan. These are completely new documents for Slovenian universities. Before, of course, we had a formal plan for development. But what does this mean? It meant a small group of people prepared some pages of excellent text, which was never discussed and never implemented (Interview 7; 2/4/2014).

Most of the initiatives that we have at this university are bottom-up. And when they are bottom-up, it is very clear where the interest comes from. But the rectorate has to see the university as a whole. So an initiative has to be considered for the benefit of all the university and, therefore, for all of the members. And some of the procedures that we have in order to process such initiatives [are intended to] give it a proper and meaningful place in this situation...I fear that the members that would like to come and get such initiatives into force, they just see procedures.

This is only money distribution. OK, I am too cynical. Of course such things are moving slowly. We are developing quality management stuff, reporting, monitoring stuff, etc. but the quality of these documents, the impact of these things is quite reduced. So maybe in 10 years [there will be an impact] because our system is quite reluctant to any change, to any reforms, to any things that change individual behaviour and competences (Interview 6; 7/4/2014).
Interpretation

External Influences

• Accreditation(s) – university- and faculty-level
• Internationalisation
• Rankings
• Financial crisis
• Legislative and systemic environment

Internal Influences

• technical solutionism – gap between declarative and experienced change: implications for trust?
• Inequality between faculties in terms of size, power, resources, degree of integration, etc. Consequent power imbalance
• ‘reflexive positionality’ (lack thereof) - an individual’s affiliation with and awareness of their role as being part of, and contributing to, the holistic institutional environment

Provide both opportunities and constraints for university integration - require increased strategic action from both faculties and the rectorate.
• Quotes:

*Internationalisation does a lot of good for universities. But internationalisation happens on two levels: on the faculty level and at the university level. Because the faculties have a very high level of autonomy in their activities, it does not always benefit everyone equally (Interview 13; 4/4/2014).*

*A huge help was the methodology of the accreditation process. The first rule is that institutions must have their own vision mission and strategic programme....We started in 2012 with the self-evaluation process. We invited external evaluators from EUA. They gave us their recommendations. We used their recommendations as a platform for our programme. In the same year, we also had the national institutional accreditation process. We took this as an opportunity to prepare the system; to define the processes and the relationship between the rectorate and the members (Interview 7; 2/4/2014).*

*We really don’t have money, even for salaries. We really just think how to survive. Therefore people don’t think very much about [integration]. But if we want to improve the situation, we need to think about that (Interview 1; 26/3/2014).*

*University-wide projects are not visible on the ground; nothing. (Interview 6; 7/4/2014).*
Enactment

Identity

• Concerted strategic planning efforts (i.e. profiling)
  – Although, extent to which formal attempts to produce a common organisational identity actually impact individuals in questionable...

  ...we need some reflection, some analysis, to see where we are, where we need to go, some action plans; then implement them...Like all businesses in the world that want to survive. In our case, after years and years, we pushed to have something like a strategy (Interview 6; 7/4/2014).

We made an action plan. But it’s general good wishes; no clear actions. And nobody is pushing (Interview 6; 7/4/2014)

• Identification with the faculty remains strong
  – Phrases like, “in our school”, and “at our faculty” were ubiquitous during interviews. Indeed, “we” almost exclusively referred to the faculty, rather than the university as a whole.
Enactment

Hierarchy

• Tension between collegiality and hierarchical decision-making
  
  The university leadership, not the faculty leadership, should take most of decisions and responsibility regarding financing and strategic priorities (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)

  Collegial governance is inefficient. Key decision making competencies should be passed from academics to a professional director (or manager) and management structure – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)

  it is necessary or inevitable to professionalise the management of universities (CEPS, 2013)

• New professional structures
  
  • Both universities have established career centres, quality offices, and technology transfer centres.
  
  • But units are small, under-staffed, not professionalised, duplicated at faculties.
  
  • Thus, governance structure remain largely un-professionalised and inefficient

I am not very happy because sometimes this decentralisation is an excuse for not making a proper management... The issue is that management should work. If you decentralise you need very clear rules, very clear monitoring. But in our case, each department has its own policies, own processes; we don’t have a lot of managerial things. Ok, the general rules are the same. It’s the same story with the university, because each faculty is a different planet (Interview 6; 7/4/2014).
Enactment

Rationality

- While strategic documents have been published, the actual goals tend to be broad and imprecise – measuring outcomes becomes problematic
- However, QA an area of focus at both universities
  - developing more concrete quality measures a high priority
  - both universities upgrading ICT systems, standardising university systems to improve the quality loop.
  - UM: quality indicators have been designed for the goals and priorities in the strategic programme. UL on track to also do this.
- Caution: Relevance and work-load!

The audit format introduces a one-way accountability and provides ‘rituals of verification’ instead of fostering trust, has high opportunity costs and may well be detrimental to innovative teaching and learning (Hoecht, 2006). More than half of the interviewees questioned the relevance and consequences of the new systems and processes under development

The common interest is in our mission. If we are going to do this [integration], we need to make the right condition and reduce the administration. 20 years ago, I was not pressed so much with this planning, reporting and all that. We don’t need this plan or that. Just leave me so I can work. Don’t make another service and another administration department (Interview 1; 26/3/2014).
Final Reflections

• While **attitudes are shifting** within the two Slovenian universities to accept the inevitability of a more *integrated* university, there remains a **degree of variation** as to how the two universities interpreted and enacted such change.

• Socio-cultural and **historical identities**, coupled with **scepticism** towards transnational policy discourses, prevents whole-hearted adoption of change. May be justified given the negative fallout of recent market-oriented HE policies, e.g. burgeoning private sector with questionable quality and integrity, the troubled implementation of the Bologna process and the increased demands on the professoriate with little demonstrable benefit.

• Generally, how to rationalise/standardise the ‘multi-versity’?
  – Sensitivities: what to change and what to preserve? how to balance accountability and academic freedom? how to build contextual and systemic awareness?
Thank you!
Sources

- European Higher Education Area (2014), [www.ehea.info](http://www.ehea.info)